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ABSTRACT

The author of this article describes the various aspects of her job as the Modern Language Tutor Coordinator at Santa Monica College. The author writes that, in general, her days consist of wearing a number of different hats each day, including that of budget and payroll administrator, grant writer, tutor screener, tutor trainer, tutor employer, tutor coordinator, tutor, psychological counselor, mediator, computer trouble-shooter, researcher, writer of recommendations, friend, and surrogate parent. The author describes the multitude of duties and tasks that beset her everyday in each of these fifteen job roles. This article presents a description of Santa Monica College, which reflects the international atmosphere in Southern California in its language offerings. It also gives a description of the college's Modern Language Tutoring Center, the services it offers, and the limitations it occasionally faces when the Center gets extremely crowded with tutees and not enough tutors. The author asserts that the job of tutor coordinator necessitates prime people skills. She believes tutor coordinators to be the most social of all social animals, as helping people is their job. (VWC)

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The Multiple Demands of a Tutor Coordinator:

How to Balance a Very Split-Personality Job

By

Iris Dolores Thot,

Modern Language Tutor Coordinator, Santa Monica College

As the Modern Language Tutor Coordinator at Santa Monica College, a two-year community college in the greater Los Angeles area, I am beset by a multitude of duties and tasks everyday. Some days are slower than others, off course, but in general, my days consist of my wearing a number of different hats a day, some which I never thought I would wear, and, frankly, which I really never wanted to. These hats include that of budget and payroll administrator, grant writer, tutor screener, tutor trainer, tutor employer, tutor coordinator, tutor, psychological counselor, mediator, computer trouble-shooter, researcher, writer of recommendations, friend and surrogate parent.

The Institution:

Santa Monica College is one of the foremost community colleges in the state of California, and was listed as one of the top ten colleges in ***Rolling Stone*** magazine last year. The college's academic excellence and prime location in vibrant Southern California attract students from all over the

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world. Santa Monica College boasts the largest international student population of any community college in the nation, with about 2,600 students from more than 100 countries.

The international atmosphere is reflected in the language offerings at the college. Unlike many two-year colleges, which have minimal offerings in foreign languages, SMC's Modern Language Department offers students the choice of ten languages: Chinese, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Persian, Russian, and Spanish.

Some of these languages are reflected in large ethnic populations in the greater Los Angeles area. During the Fall and Spring semesters, there are, on average, 89 Modern Language classes offered, most of which are filled to capacity, placing a large strain on our already limited tutoring facilities.

The Modern Language Tutoring Center:

The tutoring center for Modern Languages is located adjacent to the Modern Language Lab. Several glass windows and a door separate the lab from the center. Tutoring does not count for lab credit, and students who come in are invariably very motivated in learning the language in question.

Students who are at C levels and below are usually prompted by faculty to go in for tutoring by mid-semester, and/or are notified by the college

administration if they are on academic probation and should seek extra help.

Tutoring at the Modern Language Tutoring Center is different from some of the other tutoring centers on the Santa Monica College campus. Many of them, including the English Tutoring in the Humanities Center, the Liberal Arts/Social Science Tutoring in the Humanities center, and the Math Lab, offer tutoring through appointments. Modern Language Tutoring has long abandoned appointments for drop-in services, since this way students don't need to make arrangements ahead of time, and can come immediately without having to wait upwards of two weeks for an appointment.

The center is not without its limitations, however. Unfortunately, the demands of the more than 2,200 students served by the tutors each year far exceed the current tutoring staff which, through its currently budgeted pool of part-time tutors, equates to approximately two full-time equivalent (FTE) tutors.

Each semester, students are observed leaving the Modern Language Lab without accessing tutoring services and a survey completed last year indicated that 30% of students enrolled in modern language courses were unable to access the tutoring services they needed.

Although idealistically it should work, the drop-in system often falls short when there is an excess of tutees and limited tutors. On certain days of the week during the Fall and Spring semesters (the Winter and Summer sessions are routinely calmer), especially on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the tutoring center can get extremely crowded.

When the center gets crowded, those languages for which there is only one tutor on duty at any one time such as German, Persian, Hebrew, Korean, Russian, Italian, and Chinese get inundated with students needing help, often creating a ratio of five to one (students to tutor). In these instances, although students have literal access to a tutor, the quality of the assistance may be lacking due to the tutor being overworked.

All in all, the reviews, which the tutoring center has received in recent years, however, have been very good. Students appreciate the opportunity to connect with a tutor instantly without having to make an appointment, and praise about tutor competence and cordiality is not uncommon.

Job #1: Budget Administrator:

During the course of this past Fall Semester it became painfully apparent to me how essential a part the budget plays in my role as tutor coordinator. I am given a certain budget each year, but, unfortunately, often do not find out exactly what that amount is until October. The fiscal year, however, begins back in July.

This particular year my supervisor and I were expecting a budget augmentation, which did not come through. By the time we found this out, however, it was already four months into the new fiscal year, and I was over budget. At the time of this writing there are still five months before the arrival of a new budget and so the Modern Language Tutoring Program is literally functioning on a shoe string budget. What will see us through is a heavy reliance on Federal Work-Study and volunteers.

Budget tips: a) Know your budget. b) Operate as if you were not getting a budget increase, unless you have it in writing that you are actually getting one. c) Rely as much as you can on Federal Work-Study tutors and volunteers. d) Prepare bi-monthly budget reports. e) Personally go over these reports with your boss. f) Periodically compare your budget reports with those from payroll and make sure there are no discrepancies.

Job #2: Payroll Administrator:

This job can seem overwhelming when the semester is well underway, the tutoring center is bursting at the seams, and there are ten people waiting to talk to you in your office. Almost immediately after I was hired in June of 1998, I was presented with the first "payroll."

At Santa Monica College the student payroll is processed every two weeks. It can be a tedious process if one has more than thirty tutors which

many of us tutor coordinators do. One often has to track students down to sign their time sheets and, when they forget, one has to call them.

To make things even more complicated, student tutors in California fall into four categories: a) volunteers, who don't get paid, b) Student Help, which is paid out of the coordinator's budget, c) Federal Work Study, which is paid out of a federal budget, and d) Cal-Works which is funded three quarters from a state budget, and one fourth from the coordinator's budget.

Payroll tips: a) Get on it right away. The minute you get your payroll, get on it. If your school is like ours, you will only have about two or three days turn-around time; b) Make copies of your student time-sheets before you turn them in. That way, in case they get lost or miscalculated, you have a record of how much the student is owed; c) Be neat. Scribbles may be misread by payroll; d) Have a good attitude. Although it is tedious, payroll is essential, because it is only through this method that our hard-working tutors will get paid.

Job #3: Grant Writer:

My job didn't come with the stipulation that I needed to write grants. The conscientious tutor coordinator, like myself, will eventually come to the conclusion, however, that if certain funding is to be a reality, grants are a must.

This past Fall I wrote a grant which would have funded a pool of tutors to be available inside the Modern Language Lab. Because there are no tutors available inside the lab and the tutor's time is so totally absorbed by students requiring one-on-one and group tutoring, there is no one to assist students inside the lab with language-related questions.

When students in the computer lab get stuck on a question or problem, they understandably become frustrated. More often than not students will fulfill their time in the lab, log out, and then venture into the tutoring area to wait in line to ask a tutor for help. However, by then the question has either been forgotten or has lost its relevance for the student.

The grant in question was designed to provide students inside the lab with the instant linguistic feedback they need. Unfortunately, it did not come through. There are other issues, such as additional tutors in the main center, a lack of tutor supplies and language references, which could be taken care of by means of grant funding. As long as issues exist which require funding, this tutor coordinator will continue her quest for grant money.

Grant writing tips: a) Don't be intimidated. The only way you can get grant writing experience is just that—experience! b) Ask your campus's resident grant writer for help. Most grant writers will be very happy to help you get started, and they will appreciate the fact that you are trying to do it yourself (Many of the higher-ups on many campuses have grant writers

write the entire grant for them). c) Don't be discouraged if your first grant does not go through. Persevere to get the funding you know your center needs. The students you service deserve that.

Job #4: Tutor Screener:

Before anyone can be considered as a Modern Language Tutor at Santa Monica College they must be screened. Since I am proficient in several languages, including German, Spanish, and French, I administer the tests in these languages and then correct them. After students have expressed interest in employment, they are told to come back to take a thirty-minute written language test in the language in question.

Each exam tests the student's ability in explaining grammatical concepts to students. The Spanish language exam, for instance, will ask students to identify when to use the *Preterite* and the *Imperfect*. The student taking the French exam will be asked the difference between *qui* and *que,* and the German tutor applicant will certainly be asked when it is that one uses the *Nominative, Accusative, Dative* and the *Genitive*.

Applicants in Chinese, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Persian and Russian are sent to faculty members qualified to screen students in these languages.

Those students who pass the screening mechanisms are told that they will be hired. Those who do not pass are told to review some more and then are invited back for further testing. It is not uncommon for students to pass the exam the second or even third time around.

Most importantly, however, the screening process is not meant to discourage, but rather, to encourage applicants to learn to explain the grammar concepts necessary to tutor other students. It should be mentioned that many appiicants believe they are qualified just because they are native speakers of the language. As they find out through the screening process however, this is often not enough to make them a qualified tutor.

Tutor screening tips: a) Write short screening tests for the subjects you are qualified to screen. In the tests include those concepts which are pertinent to discerning the prospective tutor's understanding of the subject area. b) For those subjects you cannot screen, find faculty on campus who will be amenable to screening tutors every time you need this service done. Most faculty members will be very helpful, since they recognize the importance of having competent tutors on campus. c) Do not skim on screening. If you don't have the time to correct a screening test, have someone else do it. No tutor should ever be let loose on students before his or her knowledge is fully evaluated.

Job #5: Tutor Trainer:

After I hire a tutor, I train them. This training is very informal and is done on an individual basis. I basically provide a student with a copy of the Modern Language Tutoring Center's policies and procedures. I then proceed to go over this list with the tutor and ask if there are any questions. Among the policies listed on the handout the tutor receives are such items as:

- Do not correct students' essays, compositions, or homework assignments, or do students' assignments for them.
- If the student has already completed an assignment and asks for correction, skim the work and see if there are any repeated mistakes and indicate one or two examples.
- Your responsibility is to help students become self-correcting, so please do not systematically go through an assignment and fix everything.

The training session also involves guiding the new tutors through the facility, telling them where to sit when tutoring, and where the reference texts are located which will assist them in doing their job.

Perhaps most importantly, I end every training session with the statement: "If a student asks you a question you don't know the answer to, do not make up an answer just to give an answer. Do not be afraid to tell the student you don't know." Many prospective tutors believe they have to be super heroes and have the answer to everything. This is unrealistic, and

it is imperative that we produce tutors with a healthy sense of their limitations.

Tutor training tips: a) If you do nothing else, be sure to drive home the fact that tutors should never give out answers to tutees. Tutors should be trained to assist, not to spoon-feed the student. b) Be open to questions, even very obvious ones such as: "How do I tutor?" Tutors need to be treated with the same patience and respect which they, in turn, are to treat their students with. c) Make sure tutors know where reference materials are kept, and that they feel comfortable using them. A foreign language-tutoring center should have copies of the *501 Verb* series in every language which is tutored.

Job #6: Tutor Employer:

It took me a while to figure out how to navigate the paper trail involved in hiring students. Off course there is a lot of paper work involved when any hiring takes place, but first being faced with all the forms can be intimidating. To make things worse, no one told me how to do the hiring part of my job. I had to figure it out for myself and, unfortunately, made some mistakes along the way.

At Santa Monica College, policy states that the person hiring must advertise jobs at the campus job center before anyone can be hired. Once the three days have elapsed, applications can be processed. Prospective

tutors fill out two applications: one for me and for my files, and one for the job center. Once filled out, the job center application is brought to me and signed, then it is taken to my boss so that she can sign it.

Due to her busy schedule, my boss often doesn't get around to signing until a week or two have passed. The application gets back into my hands, I give it to the student to take back to the job center, and then the student is processed. Only once I receive a yellow copy of the student's job center application, is the prospective tutor ready for work.

It has taken almost six semesters for me to grow completely comfortable with the hiring process. I can now estimate to a student how long it will be until they can begin work, and I am usually right on! Tutor coordinators take heart: the hiring process may be tedious and fraught with bureaucratic nightmares, but the end result is that we receive the talented tutors without whom we would not have a program.

Tutor employer tips: a) Never allow a student to begin working before his or her paperwork is ready. Not only is this technically illegal (especially in the case of international students, where this can become an INS issue), but the fact that the student will not yet have a time card will make the payroll process a difficult one. b) Don't promise a student that he or she will be able to begin working on a certain date. You will have no idea when his or her papers will be ready. A better thing to do is to advise the student

that you will call them when the paperwork is ready and they can begin working.

Job #7: Tutor Coordinator:

Finally, a job which actually fits my job description! Yes, folks, this is the job we are named after. It is also one of the most rewarding of the many jobs I do, and this is because of the social awards I reap as a result.

As the coordinator of not less than thirty tutors during an average semester, I get to know a lot of people. It is part of the job that I must get to know my tutors very well, since I need to find out about work schedules, and conflicts erupting out of situations concerning spouses, children, other jobs, and emergencies. My tutors are instructed upon their hire to always contact me if they are unavailable to tutor.

I have received innumerable calls over the years telling me about doctor's appointments, driver's tests, and midterms. Last week I received the saddest call of all; a tutor's father had died suddenly.

Besides the personal aspect of being a tutor coordinator, there is also the logistical part. Arranging the schedules of upwards of thirty tutors is not a small job, especially since I must also keep the class schedules in mind as well.

I always like to schedule a tutor either before or after a class. In subjects such as Chinese, Hebrew, Italian, Korean, Persian, and Russian, where not that many classes are offered, it is theoretically easier to place tutors, but problems arise when there are scores of sections of the same language—where to put the tutoring hour? Off course, even if everything else works out, the tutor's own schedule could be incompatible with the times before or after the courses are offered, so that one couldn't place the tutor in the proper spot anyway.

Tutor coordinator tips: a) Have patience! Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither will your tutoring program in any given semester! The best rule of thumb is to begin early and expect many drafts. b) Don't send out schedules to instructor's until you are into at least one or two weeks of your tutoring program. If you try to send out schedules too soon, things will change and you will have to send them out yet again. c) Be flexible. Just as we expect tutors to adjust their schedules to fit our program, we have to give a little to adhere to a tutor's child-care or work schedule. d) Have fun. This is one of the most visible and creative parts of our jobs. Enjoy it and take pride in your role in helping students learn.

Job #8: Tutor:

This is my personal favorite part of the job. I had been a teacher and professor for many years before embarking upon the particular adventure

of being a *Tutor Coordinator* and so the tutoring aspect had a familiar feel to it.

Since our center provides tutoring in ten different languages, I am often called upon to jump in when my tutors are over-loaded; this I do in no fewer than three languages (sometimes four!). It is not uncommon that I will have German, French, and Spanish students at my table all at the same time. Tutoring different subject matters (not to mention different levels!) is certainly a challenge, but it is one which I do willingly and lovingly.

Tutoring at the Modern Language Tutoring Center is done through a drop-in basis only. We offer no appointments anymore since our demand is just so great that appointments would not satisfy the needs of the majority of our students. Drop-in tutoring functions by means of the tutors sitting at a table with a sign specifying the language they tutor. When I tutor, I do so on a needs-only basis. I don't put my hours on the schedule but students know I am available if they need help. In fact, I have many "regulars," who come only to me. In these situations, I tutor them on a table right outside my office.

In terms of scheduling, a master schedule is placed on two different bulletin boards in the center as well as on the Tutoring Center web site. At a glance, the tutoring schedule gives the tutors' names, the languages they tutor, as well as the times they are available. All students have to do is show up at the center at the appropriate time, and they will receive the

tutoring they need. No appointment is necessary like it is in some other tutoring centers on the Santa Monica College campus.

At times, students will have to share tutors with other students. With one exception, I have never received any complaints about this situation from students. When I train tutors I give them this strategy for tutoring more than one student: Work with one student for about ten minutes, give him or her some exercises to do, and then work with the next student. It may sometimes feel like an assembly line in our center, but my tutors and I always try to make everyone feel welcome!

Tutor tips: a) Make the student feel welcome and at ease. If any learning will take place, it will only happen if the student is relaxed. b) Find out what level the student is in and who his or her teacher is. If you happen to know the instructor's style, this might aid you in giving the student helpful study hints. c) If tutoring more than one student at a time, give each student approximately ten minutes of your time, give him or her some work to do (either exercises in the text, workbook, or write your own), and then turn to the next student. d) Be patient! You may know your subject backwards and forwards, but students won't. e) Don't spoon-feed students. Tutors should guide students to the correct answers, not give them to them. f) Get a bookstand so that when you help students you are not slouching over to see the book. Back problems can be avoided by using this handy device.

Job #9: Psychological Counselor:

One of my saddest tasks this Winter Session was to act as psychological counselor to one of my tutors whose father had died. Since my tutors know that they are to call me whenever they can't work, Liora called and said that something terrible had happened. When I responded empathetically how sorry I was to hear that something terrible had happened to her, she broke down and told me the specifics. I was heartbroken, since I know Liora very well and have grown very fond of her.

Not only did Liora flee her native Iran three years ago so that she could enjoy more professional and economic opportunities (she is Jewish), but she had to leave her beloved parents and three siblings behind. One other sister lives in Montreal, while Dahlia, the sister with whom she came to Los Angeles, recently got married. Liora, who is still single, had to survive her biggest moments of grief alone. She would come to work and sob all day. I made it a point to find time to talk to her and comfort her, and, especially, just to listen. She has repeatedly told me how she appreciated my time and caring.

Liora is not the only one I have "counseled." Throughout the year and a half that I have been a tutor coordinator at Santa Monica College I have heard many very sad stories about abusive parents, dead spouses, or estranged siblings. Students and tutors, alike, confide in me and I always

keep this information confidential. Of course, I always make sure to refer students to the free counselors in the student health office.

Psychological counselor tips: a) Be a good listener. What anyone in pain most needs is someone who will just let them pour their heart out. b) Never brush off a student who you can see has a clearly urgent need to talk. Listen for a few minutes and then refer the student to counseling. c) Never say "This is not my job." If it is our job to care about students and make sure they are successful, it *is* our job to lend an ear to a needy student or tutor. d) Be kind. The kindness you show someone today will come back to you one hundred-fold tomorrow. e) If you meet a student with a desperate situation, refer him or her to counseling immediately. Although we can act as stand in counselors, we are *not* substitutes for the real thing.

Job #10: Mediator:

I have a very quiet personality, one which rarely clashes with others. Students and tutors see this and it is not uncommon for two or more of them to come to me if they have a dispute. In these situations I try my best to have everyone calm down, and I try to be as objective as possible. Most of the time, these situations work themselves out, and everyone leaves in peace.

The situation in which I was the most uncomfortable, was when I was stuck in the middle of a conflict between a tutor and a staff member. The

tutor came to me and complained, I stayed neutral, calmed the individual down, and then went to speak with my colleague to get her side of the story. As it turned out, a simple misunderstanding had precipitated the agitation between the two, and I, as the objective party, was in the position to clear the air.

Mediator tips: a) Remain objective! The worst thing you can do is take sides. b) Listen, listen, listen. A chance for the individuals involved in the dispute to air their grievances is perhaps much better than saying things which could widen the gulf even further. c) Don't get involved if things become violent. If there is a physical altercation, the best thing you can do is to call campus police immediately.

Job #11: Computer Trouble-Shooter:

Although not part of the Modern Language Tutoring Center, computers make up the Modern Language Lab, adjacent to the center. Not actually part of my job description, I am often called upon to help out in the lab when the supervisor is absent or not available. Usually the things which happen are minor, such as a student not being able to log onto the system, or a student forgetting his or her password.

The worst (and most exciting!) thing which I have ever been called upon to do in the absence of the supervisor is to arrange for an alternate method of student check-in to the lab; the present system is composed of students

swiping their student I.D. cards into a computer bar-code machine. The student information is then registered into the computer so that we have their student numbers, the language class in which they are presently involved, and their in and out times.

When the computer connected to the computer bar-code machine is down, then an alternate check-in method must be used. What I did was to have the long line of waiting students fill out vanilla cards, which were then later entered into the system when it was back up and running.

The second most exciting thing which I had to take charge of was when the video server inside the lab went down unexpectedly. I immediately put up a sign stating that the server was down, and called Academic Computing on campus. The problem was solved within a couple of hours.

Computer trouble-shooter tips: a) <u>If there is a computer lab associated with your center, learn the basics such as what to do in case the computer goes down, etc. Do this even if it is not an official part of your job description!</u>

<u>Job #12: Researcher:</u>

Since I worked on research related to my Ph.D. dissertation two years ago, I have fallen in love with research and research-related tasks. Not always a friend of research, I used to loathe writing papers which required

any extensive research in college. As I got further and further in my graduate studies, however, and found a topic I was actually passionate about, study abroad, I began to love doing research!

My dissertation involved a survey of 212 former participants of four study foreign-sponsored study abroad programs. As the data trickled in and I had enough to actually run statistics on, I was exuberant! I have since presented my results at various state and out of state conferences.

Since I have started work at Santa Monica College I have continued my various research projects. Over the last academic year I conducted a survey of students in both the old and the new Modern Language Labs on campus. The old lab was an ancient tape-based variety, with no computers to speak of except for two aging Apple 2's.

The new and present lab is equipped with 45 Pentium 11,4000 N4Hz computers with CD-ROM drives and 17" color monitors. Each of these computers features a Tandberg DIVACE virtual digital cassette recorder and digital media player which permits students to listen to lessons, to record their own voices and to watch modern language instructional videos at each station.

The lab has a scanner, tape recorder and VCR connected to a specialized computer station. The 45 PC student stations are controlled by the teacher's computer at the Prisma Master Console and monitored by the Tandberg Supervisory System. The lab supervisor or teacher can listen to

and communicate with each student station, view the student screens, pair or group stations and take control of all functions when necessary. Quite a difference from tape recorders which were constantly breaking down!

As one can well imagine, student views on each lab were widely different, and led towards interesting results. These results have been presented by me so far in California and in Utah.

Research can be fun, and gives the person doing it a supreme feeling of satisfaction. Besides this particular article, I have also written several others regarding tutoring and foreign language tutoring, in particular. I take great pains to find journals which will be eager to take these articles. I have submitted several other articles to the ERIC database, run by the U.S. Department of Education.

Researcher tips: a) Start small; don't attempt to survey the entire U.S. population just yet. Begin with the students who frequent your center. b) Don't think that you don't have what it takes to be a researcher. All you really need is the desire to do it, and a little background in research methods. Check out your local library or bookstore for a good guide.

Job #13: Writer of Recommendations:

Every year shortly before March 1st, there is a frenzy among Santa Monica College students to apply for one of the numerous school-

sponsored scholarships. Since the deadline is on the first day of March, I get innumerable requests from tutors and former tutors for letters of recommendation. This year, alone, I have written close to fifteen.

I don't consider these letters to be work, however. I entirely enjoy writing these letters, and it is a privilege for me to give back to these tutors what they have given to my program.

A typical letter of recommendation which I write generally encompasses four or five paragraphs, and includes how long I have known the individual, in what language(s) he or she tutored, level of grammatical accuracy, character traits, and how the tutor interacts with students. I also include the tutor's approximate academic level. I usually end the letter with my projections for the individual's success in the future, and my recommendations.

Each letter I write is different, since all of my tutors are unique in regards to the language(s) they tutor, their style of tutoring, their personality, and their goals. All the letters are similar in my high regard for each and every individual I write a letter of recommendation for. I don't write bad letters. In the rare instance that I cannot say anything good about a student, I simply tell the individual right off that I cannot recommend him or her.

Writer of recommendations tips: a) Do a good job. Just as we as coordinators deserve to have tutors who give their best to the job, they

deserve to have us write them a decent letter of recommendation. b) Enjoy it. Your tutors are wonderful people. Enjoy doing them a favor.

Job #14: Friend:

Actually, I consider being a friend to be a privilege and certainly not a job, but it is one of the many hats which I wear in my capacity as Modern Language Tutor Coordinator, and it is one of my favorites! The friendships I have garnered while at Santa Monica College are priceless. In the almost two years that I have been here, I have acquired friends among faculty, staff, tutors and tutees. I consider each particular friendship to be different and unique.

Most of the friendships I develop are among my tutors. Many of them are similar in age to myself and most of the time we are swapping stories about health, family, and children. Being a friend is a great joy and one of the best perks of my job. You new tutor coordinators have a lot to look forward to!

Friend tips: a) Don't be afraid to develop friendships with students or tutors. I have found that these friendships *do not* deflect from the work environment, but rather make it better. b) Enjoy! This is among the best parts of the job!

Job #15: Surrogate Parent:

This job certainly goes together with that of job #13; one cannot be a good surrogate parent to a student without first being their friend. Quite a few of my friendships with students, especially with the tutors, have eventually revolved around the fact that these individuals regard me as a substitute parent.

One must understand the circumstances surrounding many of these young people; quite a few of them are asylum seekers in the United States, having to leave their families behind. Many of the girls, especially, reveal things to me of a personal nature, which are usually reserved for conversations between mother and daughter. Of course I am honored by this "status" in their lives, but I am also saddened that the parent-figure is often absent, either physically or emotionally.

All things notwithstanding, this is one of the facets of my job which makes me feel the most useful, even more useful than tutoring, at times. If I know that a young person respects me as much as his or her own parent, I know that I have made an impact in that individual's life. That is worth more to me than all the money in the world.

Surrogate parent tips: a) Keep all conversations completely confidential. It is important that we respect our tutors' or students' privacy, especially if they are confiding in us. b) Be there for them. Some of these individuals have been through very traumatic times and need us to at least give them a

moment of our undivided attention. c) Treat these students and tutors as if they were your own children. Their parents would thank you.

Conclusion:

My life has been much enriched through my work at Santa Monica College. To be fit for the job of tutor coordinator I believe that one necessitates prime people skills. Without the skills to navigate the minefields of personal relationships with tutors, students, faculty and staff, even the most intelligent of tutor coordinators would be lost.

I must admit that at times I lament the fact that I sometimes rarely have a quiet moment to myself, or that I get interrupted innumerable times during the day, but that comes with the territory. If I had wanted to sequester myself in a lab and do research all day I could have done that, but I know that I would quickly miss the vital link with people.

They say that human beings are social animals. I believe tutor coordinators to be the most social of them all. Helping people is our job. Take away the people and we no longer have a role. A grand role it is, and proud am I to be in a profession which allows me to express my love for people.